

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

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SUBJECT: FINNISH STRIKES CALLED FOR EARLY NEXT MONTH

REF: HELSINKI 0218

1. SUMMARY: LONG ANTICIPATED STRIKES LOOM IN FINLAND IN
MARCH AMID CONTINUING IMPASSE IN CONTRACT NEGOTIATIONS.
END SUMMARY

2. MARCH WILL OPEN STRIKE SEASON IN FINLAND WHERE UNION-
LEVEL COLLECTIVE BARGAINING HAS PRODUCED NO PROGRESS DURING
MONTH IN WHICH BULK OF FINNISH WORKERS WITHOUT CONTRACT
(REFTEL). UNION DEMANDS CALLING FOR AVERAGE OF SIX TO TEN
PERCENT WAGE HIKES AND/OR OTHER BENEFITS HAS POSSIBLE BEEN
STRENGTHENED FURTHER BY BANK OF FINLAND GOVERNOR'S WARNING
THAT EXCESSIVE WAGE DEMANDS COULD TRIGGER DEVALUATION.

3. TEST OF EMPLOYER (AND UNION) RESOLVE WILL COME
DURING NEXT FEW DAYS ACCORDING TO OFFICIAL STRIKE
NOTICES FILED BY LABOR UNIONS REPRESENTING OVER A THIRD
OF A MILLION WORKERS. ON MARCH 1, 4,000 SHOE
WORKERS AFFILIATED WITH SAK LABOR FEDERATION PLUS
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700 HELSINKI TELEPHONE TECHNICIANS AFFILIATED WITH
TECHNICAL FEDERATION STTK THREATEN TO STRIKE. LATTER WILL
BROADEN THEIR ACTION GRADUALLY TO REST OF
COUNTRY IF NO AGREEMENT REACHED. 16,000 SAK CHEMICAL
WORKERS PLANNING THREE-DAY STRIKE BEGINNING MARCH 2.
THEN ON MARCH 7, THE LEADING METAL WORKERS (SAK) EXPECT
BEGIN TWO-DAY STRIKE WITH MOST OF THEIR 140,000 MEMBERS,

JOINED NEXT DAY BY COMMUNIST-DOMINATED CONSTRUCTION WORKERS (SAK) WHOSE 100,000 MEMBERS PLAN FOUR-HOUR WALKOUT.

4. ANNOUNCED INTENTION OF THESE AND OTHER PLANNED STOPPAGES IS TO "SPEED UP" NEGOTIATIONS. ACTUAL FUNCTION WILL BE TO GIVE BOTH SIDES MEASURE OF STRIKES' IMPACT IN POSSIBLE PREPARATION FOR MORE SERIOUS ROUND LATER IN MONTH. AS REPORTED PREVIOUSLY, THERE IS WIDELY HELD VIEW AMONG EMPLOYERS THAT STRIKES WILL PROVIDE MANAGEMENT WELCOME EXCUSE TO SHUT DOWN IN TIME OF SLUGGISH SALES AND LARGE INVENTORIES.

5. WHILE STRIKES IN INDUSTRIAL SECTOR MIGHT CAUSE FEW PROBLEMS TO EMPLOYERS AT THIS STAGE, OTHER WORK STOPPAGES CALLED FOR IN SERVICE SECTOR COULD BRING MORE IMMEDIATE PRESSURE FOR SETTLEMENT. IN ADDITION TO TELEPHONE TECHNICIANS, WHOSE ACTION IS NOT EXPECTED INITIALLY TO DISTURB SERVICE, THE ICEBREAKER CREWMEN (SAK), POSTAL WORKERS (SAK) AND ELECTRICAL POWER PLANT TECHNICIANS (STTK) HAVE ANNOUNCED STRIKE PLANS FOR SECOND WEEK IN MARCH. GOVT HAS AUTHORITY TO DELAY AT LEAST THE ICEBREAKER STRIKE FOR TWO WEEKS, AND POSTAL WORKERS PLAN TO BE OUT FOR ONLY 24 HOURS. HOWEVER MORE SERVICE WORKERS, INCLUDING 8,300 BANK EMPLOYEES AFFILIATED WITH WHITE COLLAR FEDERATION TVK ARE ALSO THREATENING TO STRIKE, MAKING IT UNLIKELY THAT FINNISH PUBLIC WILL BE SPARED DIRECT EFFECT OF LABOR UNREST.

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6. WHILE COUNTRY PREPARES FOR WAVE OF STRIKES, SAK AT FEB 22 EXECUTIVE BOARD MEETING STRESSED THAT ITS GUIDELINES FOR CENTRAL AGREEMENT -- MAINTENANCE OF EMPLOYMENT AND FAVORABLE DEVELOPMENT OF REAL INCOME -- MUST APPLY EYEAN

TO ASPNHQVEVEZ NEGOTIATIONS.

SOCIAL DEMOCRATS AND COMMUNISTS ON WHTD MAINTAINED UNITY BY ENDORSING THIS CRITERION UNJOROOUSLY WHILE CRITICIZING GOVT FOR NOT TAKING ACTION TO IMPROVE EMPLOYMENT SITUATION AND WHILE NOTING THAT COMING STRIKES ARE CONSEQUENCE OF EMPLOYER ATTEMPTS TO LOWER LIVING STANDARD.

7. GOVT HAS NOT YET MADE DIRECT STATEMENT ON POSSIBLE RESPONSE TO THREATENED STRIKES, WHICH IN ADDITION TO THEIR ECONOMIC ASPECTS WILL BE CLOSELY WATCHED AS POLITICAL TEST OF CENTRIST PARTY MINORITY GOVT CAPABILITY TO RESOLVE INCOMES POLICY STALEMMATE

WITHOUT SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC ASSISTANCE. PRIMIN
MIETTUNEN, IN WIDE-RANGING REMARKS TO JOURNALISTS
FEB 24 (SEPTAL) DODGED QUESTION ON GOVT RESPONSE WHILE
CHARACTERIZING STRIKERS AS "THOSE SMALL GROUPS IN KEY
POSITIONS WHO ARE IRRESPONSIBLY TRYING TO BRING
SOCIETY TO ITS KNEES."
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